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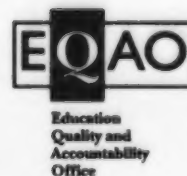
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Educator Handbook

Second Edition



Note: In this handbook, the word "parent" means a parent, legal guardian or any other person who acts as a caregiver.

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is an independent, arm's-length agency established in June 1996 by the Government of Ontario to ensure greater accountability and to contribute to the enhancement of the quality of publicly funded education in Ontario.

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Introduction

The second edition of the *Educator Handbook* builds on the concepts and procedures described in the first edition of the handbook, published in 1998.

Schools and school boards are now in the process of implementing improvement strategies and refining their action plans. As more evidence about the effectiveness of these processes becomes available, EQAO will expand this document periodically and publish revisions that incorporate examples from classrooms, schools and school boards.

This edition incorporates material from several sources:

- the action plans submitted to EQAO by school boards in February 1999
- information and materials contributed by educators, school councils and parents
- a variety of research on effective improvement planning
- principles of school and system improvement which are summarized in Appendix A of the *1998–1999 Provincial Report on Achievement*

The purpose of the *Educator Handbook* is to provide all school boards, school staffs, school councils, parents and teachers with criteria and processes that will ensure continuous improvement in learning and teaching. In addition, this document includes examples drawn from school board action plans that were posted on EQAO's web site because they satisfied many of the criteria outlined in the first edition of the *Educator Handbook*. These examples illustrate initiatives that some boards have taken in the implementation of their action plans.

This handbook is divided into three sections to support improvement planning by school boards, schools and classroom teachers. A flow chart at the beginning of each section outlines the steps involved in improvement planning. This handbook will assist:

- **school boards** as they analyze and report their assessment results and revise their board action plan for improvement;
- **the principal and staff in each school** as they analyze and report their assessment results, and as they revise and update their school action plan for improvement; and
- **individual classroom teachers** as they use the results from EQAO assessments, together with information from their own assessments, to improve learning for individual students and for all students in their class.

In the *1998–1999 Provincial Report on Achievement*, EQAO presented an analysis of the action plans that school boards submitted in February 1999. The analysis of these action plans demonstrated that some school boards and schools have considerable experience in analyzing and interpreting assessment data and in using such data as a basis for improvement planning. Many of these boards have sophisticated programs, technology and expertise in place to support improvement efforts initiated by teachers, principals and board staff. For example, one board has made a commitment to respond to requests by individual teachers and schools for in-depth analyses of results achieved by girls and boys and by various sub-groups of students and schools. On the other hand, EQAO's analysis also made it clear that a number of the plans would require signifi-

cant additions and revisions in order to provide educators, parents and community members with a coherent framework for implementing constructive changes. For example, some school boards are at the early stage of developing a board-wide policy to direct assessment, evaluation and the reporting of provincial and local results.

This handbook recognizes that school boards and schools are at different stages in their development and use of assessment data and action plans for improvement. The concepts, procedures and examples outlined in this document will be useful to all educators in their improvement planning.

We hope to include examples from school action plans and models of classroom improvement planning in future editions of the *Educator Handbook*, and we invite principals, teachers, school councils and parents to send us samples and information on the implementation of their school initiatives. School boards are required annually to submit a copy of their action plan to EQAO. Some boards have also forwarded information they have gathered on the effectiveness of their action plans and copies of resource materials they have developed for system use. We invite other boards to do likewise and hope to draw on a broad range of school board material in future editions.

Additional copies of this handbook, the 1998–1999 Provincial Report on Achievement and all other EQAO publications can be downloaded from EQAO's web site (www.eqao.com).

School Board Improvement Planning

School boards play a critical leadership role in the improvement process. Once the annual province-wide assessments have been administered and scored and the data have been returned to schools, each school board has several important follow-up responsibilities. Each school board must:

- ensure that a process is in place to engage all educational partners in thought and discussion about the assessment data;
- review the data and recommendations in EQAO's *Provincial Report on Achievement*;
- analyze the board and school data in light of the provincial picture;
- examine information from other sources;
- report school and board results to parents and the community;
- update the board-wide action plan for improvement; and
- monitor and support the implementation of the plan over time.

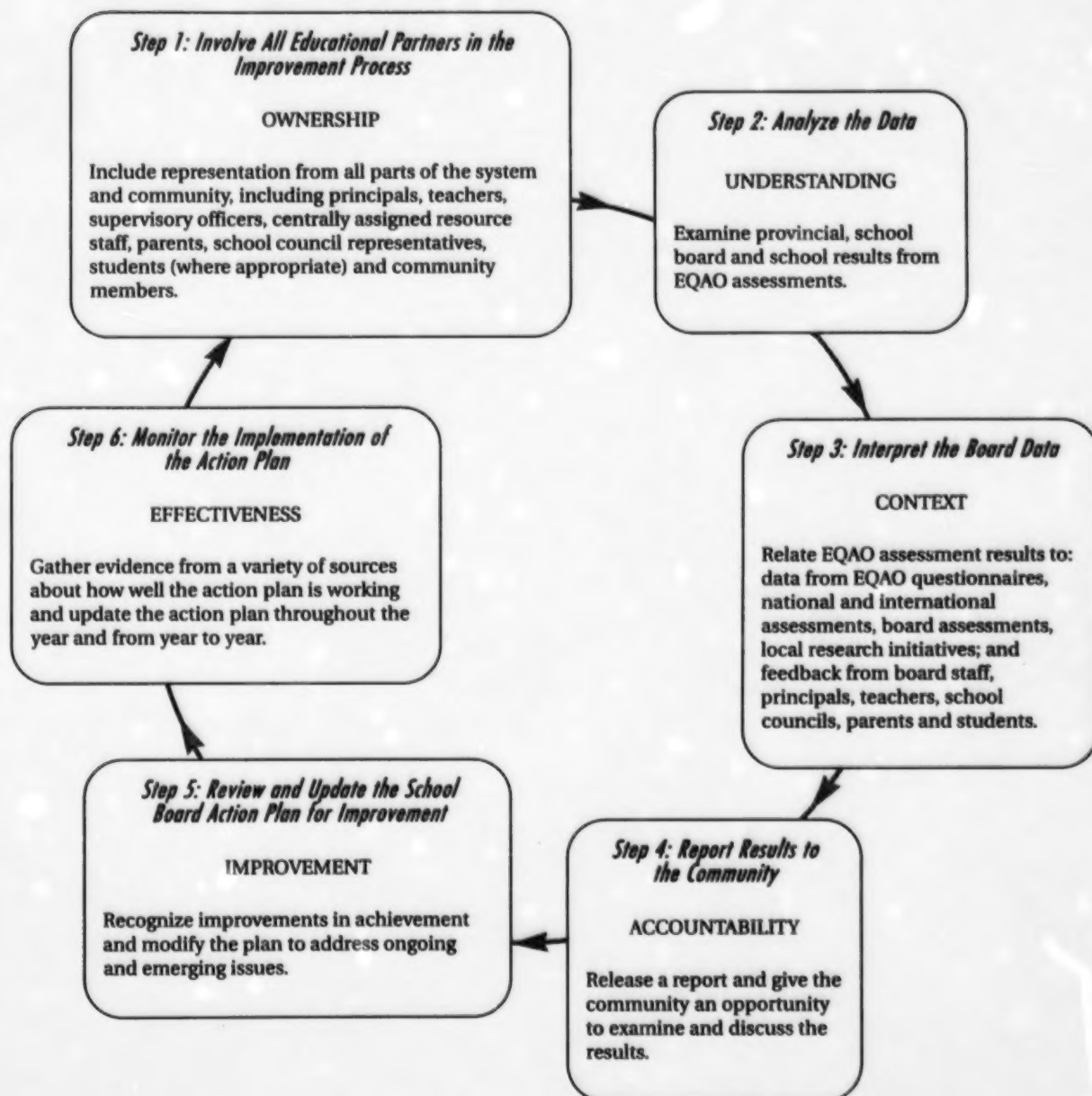
In the 1998–1999 *Provincial Report on Achievement*, EQAO published its findings from an analysis of school board action plans. EQAO plans to conduct this analysis on an annual basis. When school boards review their improvement planning process, they will want to refer to the findings of EQAO's most recent analysis of board action plans for an indication of the strengths and weaknesses commonly found in these plans. For example, EQAO's analysis of the school board action plans submitted in February 1999 found that only a few of the board action plans invited "parents, school councils and community groups to help analyze the achievement data and contextual data and prepare a board-wide plan for improvement."

School boards can support school improvement by:

- providing an overarching vision, focussing on learning;
- building schools' capacity to take charge of change and define their own direction;
- differentiating strategies and support for schools;
- helping schools foster a culture of improvement;
- encouraging and supporting school self-evaluation and public discussion of results;
- helping schools understand and work through change;
- providing in-service opportunities and resources for schools and teachers;
- promoting development opportunities and creating networks of learning communities;
- recognizing educators' need for ongoing professional development to enhance their expertise and renew their commitment;
- paying attention to context and creating inter-agency connections; and
- supporting studies which promote understanding of school improvement and effectiveness.¹

¹ Adapted from Stoll (1998).

The School Board Improvement Planning Cycle



Step 1: Involve All Educational Partners in the Improvement Planning Process

Objective: Foster a sense of ownership among educators, school councils, students, parents and community members

Education is a shared responsibility among parents, the community, students, staff and the school board. Together, these stakeholders all contribute to school improvement and student achievement. While principals, school staff and system leaders are responsible for planning and delivering programs that meet students' needs, parents, school councils, community members and students themselves are important sources of input, feedback and support. The school board is responsible for establishing the vision, directions, policies and program priorities for the system as a whole. For this reason, system initiatives need to reflect broad stakeholder involvement. Parents, school councils, students and community groups need opportunities to participate in the development, implementation and monitoring of system action plans. To participate effectively, they must be fully informed about all of the assessment data and related issues.

Boards can help to foster a sense of shared purpose and ownership by:

- giving parents, students, school councils and community members opportunities to learn more about the provincial curriculum and school programs, understand the various ways in which student achievement is assessed, become informed about the improvement process in schools and in

the school board and participate in discussions about all aspects of the improvement process; and

- including a representative cross-section of educators in the improvement process.

The following examples illustrate various ways in which boards are attempting to foster shared ownership.

Example 1**From Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board****Communication**

<i>Board/System Actions</i>	<i>School Actions</i>	<i>School Council Actions</i>
•Continue to communicate results of research to system (e.g., through newsletter, in-service, Program Cabinet meetings, network meetings) •Develop a process for two-way communication of best practices (e.g., web site, email, networking) •Continue to provide feedback to EQAO and the Minister through teleconferences, federations, OPSBA, school councils, input re. training, feedback to the Minister re. necessary supports/resources for professional development	•Provide in-service for staff which focusses on <i>The Ontario Curriculum</i> and effective instructional and assessment practices •Continue to provide feedback to the system, EQAO and the Minister; provide opportunities for staff discussion, reflection, sharing •Communicate effective strategies for parents to school community (e.g., "To do" list/"Not to do" list) •Communicate early in the school year and on an ongoing basis about curriculum and assessment	•Become knowledgeable about effective strategies for parents •Actively promote parental involvement •Actively promote parent/community volunteer involvement

Example 2**From Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board**

<i>Board/System Actions</i>	<i>School Actions</i>	<i>School Council Actions</i>
•Solicit active parent and community participation in the development of the board improvement plan •The plan is presented to Admin. Council, Program/Human Resources Committee and the board for review and modification •A media release is distributed following approval by the board •Media release is distributed to schools for inclusion in newsletters and presentations to school councils •Plan is presented to principals at Program Cabinet •EST communicates the results and improvement plan to secondary principals	•Principals share the board and school plan at staff meetings and school council meetings •Information about the plans is included in school newsletters	•Discuss and suggest modifications to the plan •Provide consultation with respect to implementation of the plan at the local school level

Step 2: Analyze the Data²

Objective: To acquire an in-depth understanding of the provincial and board assessment results, paying close attention to both the overall results and the category and strand data³

Key Questions:

- How do the board's overall results in each subject area compare to the province's overall results?
- How do the board's category and strand results in each subject area compare to the province's category and strand results in each subject area?
- What patterns are evident in the board's results? For example, did students do particularly well in a given strand or category? Do results appear to be similar among certain schools? Is overall achievement in one subject stronger or weaker than in the others?
- Are there inconsistencies in the data, and how can these be explained?
- How do the current results compare with previous years' results? Are there similar patterns from year to year? Do there appear to be any trends in the results over time?

The following example illustrates how one board addressed some of the questions outlined above in its analysis of 1997–1998 Grade 3 assessment results.

Note: Research and practice have shown that improving student achievement is a slow, gradual process. It is possible that results will fluctuate from assessment to assessment. However, significant and sustainable improvements in student achievement require focussed and persistent attention over time.

² Several boards have prepared manuals to assist educators in analyzing assessment data.

³ EQAO reports assessment results in two ways. Method 1 expresses the number of students achieving at each level as a percentage of **all** of the students in the grade, including students who were exempted and those who took part in the assessment but did not produce enough work to be scored. This is EQAO's primary method of reporting because publicly funded schools are accountable for the achievement and progress of all students. Method 2 expresses the number of students achieving at each level as a percentage of those students who **actually** took part in the assessment and produced work that could be scored. Method 2 is an alternative way of presenting the data. It highlights the results achieved by this group of students.

Example 1

From Thames Valley District School Board

Key Findings:

What TVDSB Learned About Achievement In Grade 3 Reading, Writing and Mathematics

Achievement At Levels 3 and 4

Students within the TVDSB achieved at or above the provincial average in reading, writing and mathematics for level 2 and above. When performance is calculated for level 3 and above, students achieved slightly below the provincial results in reading and writing, and above the provincial level in mathematics. While an acceptable number of students performed at level 2 and above, relatively few students performed at level 4 (3%–6%). In fact, some schools had no students performing at level 4. To achieve at level 3 and above, students must demonstrate a more extensive and thorough knowledge, application and communication of skills. They need to demonstrate understanding of more complex ideas, make logical connections, and give appropriate and precise explanations in various contexts.

Mathematics

In mathematics, 85% per cent of TVDSB students achieved at levels 2, 3 and 4; 46% of our students met the provincial standard of level 3 and above. These overall results surpass the provincial figures of 80% and 43% respectively. The mathematics results demonstrate our students' ability to understand concepts and apply mathematical procedures. However, a significant percentage of our students performed at levels 1 and 2 in the areas of Problem Solving and Communication of Required Knowledge. To improve, students need to use appropriate and innovative strategies to

solve problems, use correct mathematical terms, and give clear and precise explanations to justify reasonableness of solutions.

Reading and Writing

In reading and writing, overall performance and achievement within the knowledge/skills categories were very similar to student performance provincially. In writing, 88% of TVDSB students scored at level 2 and above. This subject area had the greatest percentage of our students (6%) performing at level 4. Performance across the four categories in writing (Reasoning, Communication, Organization of Ideas, Application of Language Conventions) was consistent. The results demonstrate students' ability to develop ideas of some complexity that are clearly related to the writing task. [The students] apply writing conventions with general accuracy but require greater skill in the ability to organize ideas and information using complex and logical connections. However, for reading, in the categories of Organization of Ideas and Application of Language Conventions, there was a greater proportion of students who performed at level 1 than in the other two categories. To improve, students need to recognize and use different organizational forms and characteristics of text to derive meaning. They must also understand and use appropriate language conventions (e.g., phonics, spelling, grammar, punctuation and style).

Step 3: Interpret the Board Data

Objective: To relate the assessment results to the range of contextual factors that influence achievement

- What does an examination of the EQAO *Student, Teacher, Principal and Home Questionnaire* data reveal?
- What other information has the board gathered through its own assessments, through external assessments or from other sources? How does this information relate to the EQAO assessment results? If there are any discrepancies, how can they be explained?
- How may the assessment results have been influenced by other factors, such as board policies, the board's action plan, school action plans, program emphases, staff development programs and resource and personnel allocations?
- What correlations can be established between strengths and weaknesses in the assessment results and the various contextual factors identified above?
- What are the implications of this contextual interpretation for board planning and for teacher and parent practices?

The following examples illustrate some boards' interpretations of their results.

Example 1

From Thames Valley District School Board

Key Findings:

ESL Students

Non-ESL students significantly outperformed ESL students and the difference between these two groups is more pronounced within the TVDSB than at the provincial level. Our ESL students achieved below the provincial average in all three assessment areas.

Special Education

Students not receiving special education significantly outperformed those who were receiving special education. The gap between these two groups for the TVDSB is similar to the provincial figure.

Male and Female Students

Responses to the questionnaire indicated that TVDSB students like to read, write and do mathematics, although the results are somewhat stronger for reading. Males are more likely than females to agree that they are good at mathematics, while females are more likely to say they perform well in reading and writing. Test results for each of the three subject areas showed that a greater proportion of females, relative to males, performed at Level 2 and above. This finding is even more pronounced for Level 3 and above.

Teacher Questionnaire Results

Teachers indicated that students spend more time per day at reading-related activities than writing or mathematics activities. Teachers remarked that they seldom have students combine information with their own experiences, extend their responses through open-ended activities, or have students create problem-solving activities. Students are not

often asked to reorganize or expand their ideas, or adapt their work for different purposes and audiences. For mathematics in particular, teachers reported they often have students do activities like those in the Grade 3 assessment for Number Sense and Numeration but seldom for Geometry and Data Management.

Implications:

Where TVDSB Needs To Focus Improvement
Based on the Key Findings, the board action plan will focus on the following five areas:

- ***Implementing the New Curriculum***

All educators need to address areas in language and mathematics where assessment results are below provincial expectations. This process involves reviewing present language and mathematics programs using provincial, board and school data from the Grade 3 assessment to identify and address gaps in the implementation of new language and mathematics curricula.

To improve student achievement, teachers must provide opportunities for students to acquire and demonstrate the knowledge and skills characteristic of higher level performance, during daily classroom teaching/learning activities and in assessments.

- ***English as a Second Language***

Teachers and Program Services staff must investigate the ESL program to determine what aspects of the program may need to be modified to improve students' achievement.

- ***Assessment Literacy***

Assessment literacy must be increased to better enable teachers and principals to interpret and utilize assessment results, employ a variety of assessment activities, make a more seamless connection between assessment and instruction, and discuss assessments with parents and students.

- ***Using the Results to Determine Best Practices***

An in-depth analysis of the school-level results must be undertaken to understand the correlation between achievement on the assessment and the various student and school factors which may impact on student learning and success on the provincial test. Identification of critical factors and exemplary practices through such an analysis will allow the board to provide appropriate resources and support to improve student achievement.

- ***Supporting a Culture of Assessment***

The board and its schools must target, through the development of policy, procedures and practices, the effective use of assessment in their curriculum programs.

Example 2

From Grand Erie District School Board

Observations and Implications

Attitudes

The negative attitude to mathematics is a concern. Only half the students like and feel confident in mathematics. Girls have more positive results in mathematics, but feel less confident. Most parents do not enjoy mathematics and writing as much as reading. We need to make math more relevant and meaningful – more fun.

Girls outperform boys in all three areas. Only slightly more than half the students enjoy reading, writing and math. We need to work with parents to encourage a positive attitude to school.

Connections

In order to improve student achievement in all areas, students need to see the connections across the curriculum. Skills such as problem-solving, open-ended questioning, and communicating learning in all subjects are essential. Students need to think about, reflect on, and communicate what and how they are learning.

Assessment

Teachers and students need to increase their repertoire of assessment and evaluation strategies across subject areas. The increased use of a variety of assessment strategies, such as self and peer assessment, conferencing, journals, rubrics and portfolios, will improve student learning.

Mathematics

Teachers have increased their confidence in mathematics and have attended many workshops. They rely heavily on curriculum staff for updating their skills. Equal emphasis needs to be placed on all math strands.

Classroom practices need more "Level Four" activities which include connections to prior learning, complex and integrated thinking, creative and innovative strategies, and appropriate and complete explanations. Math skills need to be applied across the curriculum in school and at home.

Reading

The major emphasis on math last year may partially account for little improvement in reading achievement. Again, in reading, the skills of application and communication of learning, need more attention. These include connections from text to personal knowledge or to other readings. Students need to experience a range of reading materials such as manuals, recipes, essays, letters, newspapers, and poetry.

Writing

While we are at the provincial average, there is room for improvement. Students need to have daily opportunities to write in a variety of forms: poetry, reports, letters, plays and drama. All the steps of the writing process are important: writing, editing and publishing. Writing skills develop when activities are relevant and applicable to the students' real lives.

Implications

Teachers need to share best practices through visiting other classrooms, classroom research, mentoring and dialogue on professional reading. Teachers in other grade levels need to learn from the Grade 3 assessment in order to prepare for further testing and in order to improve programs for students. Principals as curriculum leaders are responsible for planning, supporting and monitoring necessary improvements.

Involving Parents

Parents say that they want to be involved in their child's learning. Most homes have materials, such as calculators, books, writing materials for reading, writing, math. There are computers in two-thirds of the homes. Parents feel most comfortable helping students read. All parents feel they are well-informed about school activities and their child's achievement. In addition to communicating information, we need to engage parents in their child's learning. Schools need to encourage and support parents in assisting children at home. "Family Math," book bags, "Friendly Homework," involving children in grocery-buying, cooking, gardening and decorating are all relevant and meaningful activities that build knowledge and skills.

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Step 4: Report the Results to the Community

Objective: Release a report on student achievement in the board and give parents and the community an opportunity to examine and discuss the results

- Once EQAO has released the *Provincial Report on Achievement*, boards are required to communicate board and school results to parents and the public within a short period of time, typically four to six weeks. Given this time frame, it is unlikely that boards will have enough time to do a thorough analysis of the data, to interpret the data using contextual information, to consult parents and other stakeholders and to review and update their action plans for improvement. Therefore, the preliminary report is usually a functional document that describes the results and provides parents and community members with some general observations about strengths and weaknesses, and patterns and trends over time.
- Two to three months after boards publish this preliminary report, they are required to release their revised action plan for improvement. This two- to three-month period gives parents and community members an opportunity to review and discuss the results, to ask questions and to become involved in the process of reviewing and updating the action plan.

Reporting Schedule

September	<i>Individual Student Reports (ISRs)</i> returned to schools for distribution to parents and classroom teachers
October	EQAO releases the <i>Provincial Report on Achievement</i>
December	School boards and schools publish their preliminary reports on student achievement results
March	School boards and schools release their action plans for improvement

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The preliminary report to parents and the community should:

- present the board's assessment results using method 1 and method 2⁴;
- outline the provincial results;
- indicate the board's plan for distributing school results;
- provide an analysis of the board's results;
- summarize the board's interpretation of its results;
- explain the board's process for reviewing and updating its action plan for improvement;
- indicate how parents and community members can contribute to this process; and
- describe the time line for updating the action plan.

The following example describes the process one board used to review and report its assessment results.

Example 1

From Thames Valley District School Board

Schools have reviewed the *Individual Student Reports* and have provided each child's parents with a copy. Intervention appropriate to the needs of the student, based on individual performance on the assessment, is occurring as staff review the results in the context of other student information. Principals used a centrally designed template to summarize the school's overall performance, describe the school context, and to prepare an initial response to the results. In-service

was provided to assist principals with this task. Principals were required to distribute the school summary to parents of students who participated in the assessment by December 1, 1998, and to share the school results with the school council and other members of the school community, as appropriate. Most principals presented the overall school results within their school newsletter.

At the district level, the system results have been reviewed in a number of ways. The Operations Services department submitted a report of the overall system results to trustees on November 10, 1998, for information and discussion. The results were similarly presented to Supervisory Officers' Council and Program Services staff. Superintendents of Education received copies of the detailed achievement data for their community of schools and are expected to include discussions of these results with principals within the context of school improvement planning and goal setting. Results were shared with local media, and copies of the detailed summary for all schools were made available at each Community Education Centre for individuals interested in reviewing them.

An ad hoc committee of school administrators, learning support teachers, learning coordinators, and Research and Assessment staff made recommendations for the interpretation, summary and release of the results. A second team comprised of personnel from Operations Services, Program Services, and Research and Assessment Services has guided the development of the board action plan.

⁴ EQAO reports assessment results in two ways. Method 1 expresses the number of students achieving at each level as a percentage of all of the students in the grade, including students who were exempted and those who took part in the assessment but did not produce enough work to be scored. This is EQAO's primary method of reporting because publicly funded schools are accountable for the achievement and progress of all students. Method 2 expresses the number of students achieving at each level as a percentage of those students who actually took part in the assessment and produced work that could be scored. Method 2 is an alternative way of presenting the data. It highlights the results achieved by this group of students.

Step 5: Review and Update the School Board Action Plan for Improvement

Objective: Revise the action plan so that it reflects the most up-to-date information about achievement by students in the board

- In developing action plans, boards draw on good assessment data to provide schools, principals and teachers with the direction, information, opportunity and support they need to improve instruction and assessment and to respond more effectively to students' learning needs. By outlining the board's goals and directions, action plans also invite parents and the community to participate in the improvement process.
- The action plan describes the board's short-, medium- and long-term strategic directions. It takes into account data from a variety of sources. Province-wide assessment results are a critical reference point in discussions about the action plan because they provide an accurate and objective pool of information about student achievement of the provincial curriculum expectations. In the interpretation process, the board brings other information into the discussion so that the action plan is sensitive to the particular circumstances that affect student achievement within the board.
- An action plan is a work in progress. On an ongoing basis, it should be revised and updated so that it provides the most comprehensive, up-to-date and coherent improvement framework for teachers, principals, parents and community members.

Action Plan Criteria

- The purpose of the following criteria is to illustrate the full range of factors that an action plan must address. The criteria, which are based on Recommendation 8 in EQAO's 1998–1999 *Provincial Report on Achievement*, have ongoing relevance. As new information about student achievement becomes available, boards can continue to use the criteria to reassess their decisions and priorities, to review the initiatives and strategies outlined in their action plan and to modify the plan to address ongoing and emerging issues. An effective school board action plan for improvement:
 - > Reflects the input of parents, school councils and the community;
 - > Details initiatives taken by the board to improve student achievement;
 - > Recognizes procedures and strategies that are currently working well;
 - > Provides a mechanism for sharing successful practices among schools;
 - > Builds on board and provincial assessment results;
 - > Considers the subject-specific and general recommendations contained in EQAO's most recent *Provincial Report on Achievement*;
 - > Identifies areas that require improvement and explains how they will be addressed through the board's short-, medium- and long-term priorities;
 - > Describes the initiatives and strategies that will be used to achieve desired improvements;

- > Sets realistic short-, medium- and long-term improvement targets;
- > Outlines indicators, or measures of success, that the board will use to gauge its progress towards these targets;
- > Describes processes for monitoring progress and making ongoing adjustments to strategies and initiatives;

- > Identifies the resources required and assigns responsibilities;
- > Provides overall direction and support for school action plans; and
- > Includes a mechanism for sharing the contents of the plan and updates on its impact with parents, school councils and the community.

The following examples demonstrate how boards have addressed certain aspects of the criteria outlined above.

Example 1

From Grand Erie District School Board

<i>Action Plan</i>	<i>Indicators of Success</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Time Lines</i>	<i>Who's Responsible</i>
<i>Areas of Improvement</i>				
an environment that supports testing	students demonstrate comfort in testing situations; school activities are designed to provide optimum conditions for testing	newsletters, system/school communications, in-service	January–June 1999	teachers principal parents school council
appropriate program changes based on an evaluation of Grade 3 results	school staff analyze their results and choose appropriate areas for improvement teachers share "best practice"	EQAO school results Board Action Plan classroom visions, action research, coaching, courses, in-service and professional reading	January–June 1999, 1999–2000	school staff school council

Step 5: Review and Update the School Board Action Plan for Improvement

Objective: Revise the action plan so that it reflects the most up-to-date information about achievement by students in the board

- In developing action plans, boards draw on good assessment data to provide schools, principals and teachers with the direction, information, opportunity and support they need to improve instruction and assessment and to respond more effectively to students' learning needs. By outlining the board's goals and directions, action plans also invite parents and the community to participate in the improvement process.
- The action plan describes the board's short-, medium- and long-term strategic directions. It takes into account data from a variety of sources. Province-wide assessment results are a critical reference point in discussions about the action plan because they provide an accurate and objective pool of information about student achievement of the provincial curriculum expectations. In the interpretation process, the board brings other information into the discussion so that the action plan is sensitive to the particular circumstances that affect student achievement within the board.
- An action plan is a work in progress. On an ongoing basis, it should be revised and updated so that it provides the most comprehensive, up-to-date and coherent improvement framework for teachers, principals, parents and community members.

Action Plan Criteria

- The purpose of the following criteria is to illustrate the full range of factors that an action plan must address. The criteria, which are based on Recommendation 8 in EQAO's 1998–1999 *Provincial Report on Achievement*, have ongoing relevance. As new information about student achievement becomes available, boards can continue to use the criteria to reassess their decisions and priorities, to review the initiatives and strategies outlined in their action plan and to modify the plan to address ongoing and emerging issues. An effective school board action plan for improvement:
 - > Reflects the input of parents, school councils and the community;
 - > Details initiatives taken by the board to improve student achievement;
 - > Recognizes procedures and strategies that are currently working well;
 - > Provides a mechanism for sharing successful practices among schools;
 - > Builds on board and provincial assessment results;
 - > Considers the subject-specific and general recommendations contained in EQAO's most recent *Provincial Report on Achievement*;
 - > Identifies areas that require improvement and explains how they will be addressed through the board's short-, medium- and long-term priorities;
 - > Describes the initiatives and strategies that will be used to achieve desired improvements;

- > Sets realistic short-, medium- and long-term improvement targets;
- > Outlines indicators, or measures of success, that the board will use to gauge its progress towards these targets;
- > Describes processes for monitoring progress and making ongoing adjustments to strategies and initiatives;
- > Identifies the resources required and assigns responsibilities;
- > Provides overall direction and support for school action plans; and
- > Includes a mechanism for sharing the contents of the plan and updates on its impact with parents, school councils and the community.

The following examples demonstrate how boards have addressed certain aspects of the criteria outlined above.

Example 1

From Grand Erie District School Board

<i>Action Plan</i>	<i>Indicators of Success</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Time Lines</i>	<i>Who's Responsible</i>
<i>Areas of Improvement</i>				
an environment that supports testing	students demonstrate comfort in testing situations; school activities are designed to provide optimum conditions for testing	newsletters, system/school communications, in-service	January–June 1999	teachers principal parents school council
appropriate program changes based on an evaluation of Grade 3 results	school staff analyze their results and choose appropriate areas for improvement teachers share "best practice"	EQAO school results Board Action Plan classroom visions, action research, coaching, courses, in-service and professional reading	January–June 1999, 1999–2000	school staff school council

Example 2

From Durham District School Board

The Durham District School Board (D.D.S.B.) action plan has been developed by staff of the Programs Department. The plan corresponds to strands of the D.D.S.B. System Plan, Durham Direction, 1998–2001 and focusses on initiatives that address issues arising from the 1998 assessment results. Plans for long-term improvement in mathematics instruction which were implemented in the 1998 school year are ongoing. Initiatives in the action plan focus on Grade 3 and Grade 6 but also address the need to familiarize Grade 1 and 2 students with integrated assessment units. This focus acknowledges that learning is cumulative and that results on the Grade 3 assessment are the responsibility of the whole primary division. Likewise, outcomes on the Grade 6 assessment are the responsibility of the whole junior division. However, in the junior division, all but the 1998–1999 cohort of Grade 6 students will have experienced the Grade 3 assessment before participating in the Grade 6 assessment.

The action plan also reflects both the general and specific recommendations made by EQAO in its *Provincial Report on Achievement*. These recommendations are listed in Appendix A of this report.

Example 3

From Durham District School Board

3.1 Accountability and Communication

Initiative:

Building Capacity for Administrators

Issue(s) Addressed:

Administrators need to understand and clearly communicate the results for their school. They must also be able to analyze those results and to work with their staff and school community to develop an action plan. That plan should address instructional issues arising from the results of both the assessment and the contextual surveys which accompany the assessment. The strategies developed indicate the priority the board gives to effective use of assessment information, as per General Recommendation 1 of the 1997–1998 EQAO *Provincial Report on Achievement* (see Appendix A recommendations).

Strategies:

A. Three half-day workshops were held in November. One workshop was specifically focussed on newly appointed administrators. Administrators were required to attend one of the three sessions and were encouraged to bring their Grade 3 teachers and/or their Academic Resource teachers. Concepts emphasized in the workshops were understanding the results, developing a communication plan for their school, analyzing the results, identifying issues for the 1999 assessment and developing action plans. [A superintendent]⁵ indicated to principals that action plans for schools will be reviewed.

⁵ All personal and school names have been removed from the action plan excerpts contained in this handbook.

- B. [A staff member] developed an electronic template to assist principals in reporting results. The use of a template helped ensure that information about the test and about issues around the test (such as the lack of direct comparability with previous results) was consistently communicated across the board. The Assessment and Accountability Department also prepared graphs for showing each school's results calculated using Methods One and Two.
- C. Results for D.D.S.B. schools and background information sheets were distributed to the press. Breakdowns of results by area were distributed to Area Superintendents and Area Officers.
- D. A breakfast hosted by the Superintendent of Programs was held on December 2, 1998. Principals and staff from schools whose results showed improvement were invited to both celebrate success and to share strategies that led to that success.
- E. Optional follow-up sessions on developing and refining action plans were made available for administrators on January 8, 1999. The workshops focussed on sharing strategies to improve instruction, developing concrete indicators of success and on strategies to monitor the strategies that schools put in place. Action plans will be reviewed by the Superintendent of Programs.
- F. A video and accompanying workbook on developing effective action plans is being produced under the leadership of [a principal].

Indicators of Success:

- A. Workshops were well-attended and e-mails and verbal comments from principals indicated that they were favourably received. Administrators identified a series of issues to be addressed in preparing for the 1999 Assessment.
- B. Issues identified included the stress on small schools of having the Grade 3 and Grade 6 assessments scheduled during the same time period; the need to develop integrated assessment units for Grade 1 and Grade 2, scheduling concerns arising from the General Motors policy of giving its employees the Friday before the holiday off. The strategies to address these issues are detailed in Section 3.3.
- C. School reports were prepared and distributed to school communities by December 1, 1998. Copies of all school reports were submitted to the Accountability and Assessment Officer for future reference.
- D. Materials for press releases were distributed in a timely fashion and resulted in better-informed coverage of the assessment results. Area superintendents will be able to use results for their schools to develop strategies for improving instruction in their area.
- E. "Celebrate and Share Success" breakfast was well-received by principals. A list of strategies implemented was recorded and distributed to all principals.

- F. Almost half of the administrators attended one of two sessions on January 8, 1999, to work on and/or finalize their action plans prior to submission to the Superintendent of Programs on January 18, 1999. Initial review of the action plans shows that strategies are being more clearly stated; that indicators of success are more concrete, observable and therefore measurable; that principals, their staff and the S.C.C. are working to identify gaps in the implementation of the new *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8*, as per General Recommendation 2 of the *EQAO Provincial Report on Achievement*.
- G. The video on "Developing an Effective Action Plan" will be viewed as successful if future editions of EQAO action plans show more focussed strategies and contain clearer, observable outcomes and indicators of success.

Example 4

From Thames Valley District School Board

Recommendations For Improvement

The recommendations that follow are based on the Key Findings presented within this report. They address the recommendations presented within the *EQAO Provincial Report on Achievement* (p. 63) and take into account all that the TVDSB has learned about student achievement from provincial and system-wide assessments, from relevant research on effective teaching and learning practices, and from ongoing discussions with educators and parents.

Each recommendation is supported by an action plan for improvement. The plan clarifies the expected outcomes for the areas chosen for improvement, provides strategies to achieve the outcomes, lists indicators and time lines that reflect the success of the plan, and designates the person or department responsible for implementation.

This year's report includes five general recommendations.

Example 5

From Thames Valley District School Board

<i>Expected Outcomes</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Indicators of Success</i>	<i>Time Lines</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
More students will communicate mathematical knowledge at an increased level of complexity	Identify and recommend daily time allotted to mathematics	25%-30% of teaching time is allotted to mathematics including a daily block of discrete mathematics (45-60 minutes) in addition to the integration of mathematics in other areas where appropriate	September 1999	Operations Services
	Investigate the purchase or development of exemplars/criteria and other resources for mathematics	Teachers utilize exemplars as an essential part of an assessment methodology	January-December 1999	Program Department/ Ministry of Education
	Examine ways to include mathematical literacy in an overall model for curriculum implementation	Teachers are implementing strategies to improve the level of mathematical literacy of their students	Ongoing	Program Department

Example 6

From Peel District School Board

Specific Actions for Educators, Parents and Community

1. Program Services will develop a pamphlet of frequently asked questions about the EQAO assessments.
2. Research and Evaluation, Communication Services, and Program Services will offer an EQAO action planning round-table workshop to assist administrators and school teams with developing an action plan.
3. Administrators will involve parents, school councils and the community in interpreting and using assessment information.
4. Administrators, teachers and school councils will work with parents to encourage students to read for enjoyment and information beyond the school environment.
5. Administrators, teachers and school councils will work with parents to encourage students to write on thoughts, feelings and information beyond the school environment.
6. Administrators, teachers and school councils will work with parents to encourage and assist students to engage in regular activities that involve mathematics, especially outside regular school work.
7. Administrators, teachers and school councils will inform parents of ways to engage their children in enjoyable and useful mathematical activities, using mathematics in the home and asking children to explain their thinking.
8. Research and Evaluation, Communication Services and Program Services will offer workshops in the fall of 1999 for administrators on how to interpret school results and communicate them to the community.
9. Schools will incorporate Grade 3 EQAO data into the development and implementation of their school portfolio. School portfolios assist future planning by gathering, analyzing, interpreting, and communicating the school's programs, context, and student achievement.

Step 6: Monitor the Implementation of the Action Plan

Objective: To update the action plan throughout the year on the basis of quantitative and qualitative evidence gathered about the effect it is having on student achievement

Michael Fullan has stated that monitoring serves two purposes: "it provides access to good ideas and it helps to weed out mistakes and deal with problems before they get too deeply embedded."⁶ Monitoring is inseparable from both accountability and improvement. Monitoring allows educators, parents and all stakeholders to examine the strategies and initiatives that have been put in place to improve learning. Done well, the monitoring process reinforces the confidence of parents and community members in the capacity of the education system to evaluate its performance against publicly stated goals. The process must begin with an enthusiastic recognition of what is working well. Educators, parents and others need to see the monitoring process as an objective mechanism for identifying strengths and weaknesses in system performance so that appropriate modifications can be made in priorities, resource allocations, strategies, in-service programs and classroom instruction.

Key Questions:

- What qualitative and quantitative data can we collect to gauge the effectiveness of the strategies and initiatives in the action plan?
- What methods should we use to collect the data?
- Who needs to be involved in this data-gathering process, and when and how often should it be done?
- Who should be involved in analyzing the data? Is there a need for additional support from external experts?
- What process should be used to identify strengths and weaknesses in the strategies and initiatives outlined in the action plan? Who should be involved?
- How can we maintain interest and support throughout the monitoring process?
- How can we ensure the monitoring process is constructive at every stage?

The following is a brief example of one board's monitoring framework.

Example 1

From Grand Erie District School Board

The progress of the plan will be monitored in the following ways.

- analysis of EQAO test results
- review by the assessment team, early literacy team, and other program staff biannually
- periodic reviews will be reported to Program Council

⁶ Michael Fullan. "Fullan's factors affecting educational change" in Mary James, *Using Assessment for School Improvement*. Oxford: Reed Educational & Professional Publishing Ltd., 1998.

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School Improvement Planning

Schools are directly responsible for ensuring that students meet the expectations in the provincial curriculum. The school's response to data about student achievement is, in many ways, the most critical because it is within the school community that teachers, students and parents can collaborate most effectively to improve learning and teaching. School assessment results allow teachers and parents to measure the impact of school programs and to identify factors in the learning environment inside and outside the school that need to be addressed in order to improve student achievement. Once the annual province-wide assessments have been administered and scored and the data have been returned to schools, teachers, parents and the school council must work together to:

- prepare a preliminary report that summarizes assessment results for parents, the school council and community members and provides information about school demographics and programs (i.e., a school profile);
- determine the areas of knowledge and skill where improvement is required;
- set specific short-, medium- and long-term improvement targets;
- determine where modifications may be needed in programs and teaching strategies and in how parents reinforce students' learning at home;
- ensure that a school action plan is in place that identifies areas of focus, establishes specific outcomes with indicators for measuring success, describes school and classroom strategies and implementation plans, provides for ongoing review and indicates next steps;
- implement the plan and monitor its impact on students' learning; and
- update and revise the plan over time.

An Improving School:

- Enhances student outcomes
- Focusses on teaching and learning
- Builds the capacity to take charge of change, regardless of its source
- Defines its own direction
- Assesses its current culture and works to develop a culture of improvement
- Has strategies to achieve its goals
- Addresses the internal conditions that enhance change
- Maintains momentum during periods of turbulence
- Monitors and evaluates its process, progress, achievement and development

Adapted from Stoll and Fink (1996).

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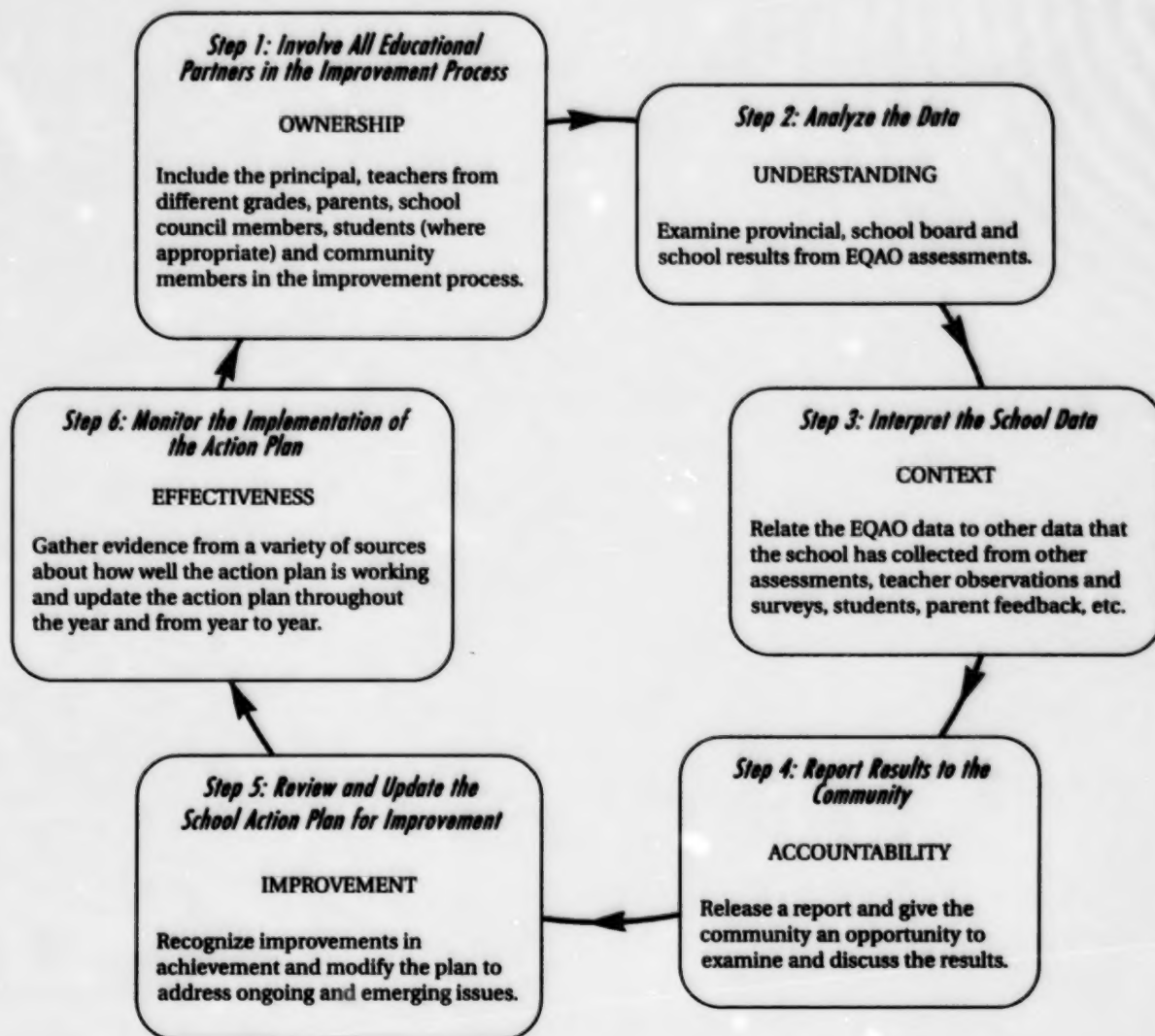
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- Monitors and evaluates its process, progress, achievement and development

Adapted from Saell and Fink (1996).

The School Improvement Planning Cycle



Step 1: Involve All Educational Partners in the Improvement Process

Objective: Foster a sense of ownership among teachers in all grades and subject areas, parents and community members

It is impossible to overstate the importance of strong school-home-community partnerships. Learning takes place within and outside the school. Parents, school councils, students and community groups need opportunities to participate in the development, implementation and monitoring of action plans. To participate effectively, they must be fully informed about all of the assessment data and related issues.

Schools can help to foster a broad-based sense of ownership by:

- Giving parents, school councils and community members opportunities to learn more about the provincial curriculum and school programs, understand the various ways in which student achievement is assessed, become informed about the improvement process in schools and in the school board and participate in discussions about all aspects of the improvement process.
- Involving teachers from all grades and subject areas in the improvement planning process. Since students' learning is cumulative and integrated across subjects, participation in the improvement process must extend beyond teachers of specific grades to encompass the entire school.

Step 2: Analyze the Data⁷

Objective: To acquire an in-depth understanding of the provincial and board assessment results, paying close attention to both the overall results and the category and strand data⁸

Key Questions:

- How do the school's overall results in each subject area compare to the board's overall results and the province's overall results?
- How do the school's category and strand results in each subject area compare to the board and provincial results?
- What patterns are evident in the school's results? For example, did students do particularly well in a given strand or category? Do results appear to be similar among certain schools? Is overall achievement in one subject stronger or weaker than in the others?
- Are there inconsistencies in the data, and how can these be explained?
- How do the current results compare with previous years' results? Are there similar patterns from year to year? Do there appear to be any trends in the results over time?
- How do our results compare to those achieved by other schools which must address similar populations and challenges?

Note: Research and practice have shown that improving student achievement is a slow, gradual process. It is possible that results will fluctuate from assessment to assessment. However, significant and sustainable improvements in student achievement require focussed and persistent attention over time.

⁷ Several boards have prepared manuals to assist educators in analyzing assessment data.

⁸ EQAO reports assessment results in two ways. Method 1 expresses the number of students achieving at each level as a percentage of all of the students in the grade, including students who were exempted and those who took part in the assessment but did not produce enough work to be scored. This is EQAO's primary method of reporting because publicly funded schools are accountable for the achievement and progress of all students. Method 2 expresses the number of students achieving at each level as a percentage of those students who *actually* took part in the assessment and produced work that could be scored. Method 2 is an alternative way of presenting the data. It highlights the results achieved by this group of students.

Step 3: Interpret the School Data

Objective: To relate the assessment results to the range of contextual factors inside and outside the school that influence achievement

- What does an examination of the school *Student* and *Home Questionnaire* data reveal?
- What light do the provincial and board *Student, Teacher, Principal* and *Home Questionnaire* data shed on our school questionnaire data?
- How do the EQAO achievement results compare with information from classroom assessments, with other school assessments and with teachers' perceptions of students' knowledge and skills?
- What contextual factors can teachers and parents identify that may have contributed to the results?
- How may the assessment results have been influenced by other factors, such as school and board policies, the school or board action plan, program emphases, staff development programs and resource and personnel allocations?
- What correlations can be established between strengths and weaknesses in the assessment results and the various contextual factors identified above?
- What are the implications of this contextual interpretation for school planning and for teacher and parent practices?

Step 4: Report the Results to the Community

Objective: Release a report on student achievement in the school and give parents and community members an opportunity to discuss the results

- Once EQAO has released the *Provincial Report on Achievement*, boards and schools are required to communicate local results to parents and the public within a short period of time, typically four to six weeks. Given this time frame, it is unlikely that schools will have enough time to do a thorough analysis of the data, to interpret the data using contextual information, to consult with parents, the school council and other stakeholders and to review and update their action plans for improvement. Therefore, the preliminary report is usually a functional document that describes the results and provides parents and community members with some general observations about strengths and weaknesses, patterns and trends over time.
- Two to three months after schools publish their preliminary report, they are required to release their revised action plan for improvement. This two- to three-month interval gives parents and community members an opportunity to review and discuss the results, to ask questions and to become involved in the process of reviewing and updating the action plan.

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Reporting Schedule

September	<i>Individual Student Reports (ISRs)</i> returned to schools for distribution to parents and classroom teachers
October	EQAO releases the <i>Provincial Report on Achievement</i>
December	School boards and schools publish their preliminary reports on student achievement results
March	School boards and schools release their action plans for improvement

The school's report to parents and the community should:

- present the school's assessment results using method 1 and method 2⁹;
- outline the board and provincial results;
- provide an analysis of the school's results;
- comment on similarities and differences between the school results and the board and provincial results;
- provide information on the school's population, programs and challenges (i.e., a school profile);
- summarize the school's interpretation of its results;
- explain the school's process for reviewing and updating its action plan for improvement;
- indicate how parents and community members can contribute to this process; and
- describe the time line for updating the action plan.

⁹ EQAO reports assessment results in two ways. Method 1 expresses the number of students achieving at each level as a percentage of **all** of the students in the grade, including students who were exempted and those who took part in the assessment but did not produce enough work to be scored. This is EQAO's primary method of reporting because publicly funded schools are accountable for the achievement and progress of all students. Method 2 expresses the number of students achieving at each level as a percentage of those students who **actually** took part in the assessment and produced work that could be scored. Method 2 is an alternative way of presenting the data. It highlights the results achieved by this group of students.

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Example

School Template for Reporting Results of Provincial Assessment to Parents Grade 3 Assessment of Reading, Writing and Mathematics: 1998-1999 ABC Junior School

School Address:	125 Noname Street Anycity, ON H0H 0H0	Principal:	Ms. J.C. Leader
Telephone Number:	(888) 555-3333	Grade Levels:	JK-6
Fax Number:	(888) 555-2222	Enrolment:	378 students
		XYZ Board	
		Information:	555-1234

Part 1: School Profile

Sample:

ABC School is located in the ABC Park Community. The school was built in 1949, and additions were made in 1961 and 1987. The school serves over 350 students from nearly 10 different language groups, with the three largest groups speaking English, Chinese or Tagalog as their home language. Special education programs, the learning centre and a part-time gifted class all have a strong emphasis on integration.

The school shares space with a day-care centre and abuts the community park, with which it shares recreational equipment. Several community groups, including Parents and Tots, English for Moms, the local Sparks and Brownie troops and the baseball league (during the spring and fall) use meeting space and the gymnasium after hours and in the evenings.

In the last few years, the school has emphasized mathematics (Family Math nights), literacy (setting up a Borrow-a-Book program with the Parent Teacher Association), and health and safety (Zero Tolerance, Conflict Resolution and Walk-a-Buddy programs). The staff and community support a variety of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, including a comprehensive house league program, school teams, choirs and an extensive After Four Program.

ABC School enjoys a healthy partnership with the school council, with all working hard to achieve our common goals. Parents also serve on many committees and assist at many functions where their expertise and support are invaluable.

We are a community of lifelong learners who work together to respect our different economic, cultural and physical needs. Our students are given the opportunity to experience a variety of activities in their school life.

Part 2: Key Findings

Insert EQAO achievement data, using both method 1 and method 2, and explain the results. Suggestion: Follow the same format as used in the EQAO *Provincial Report on Achievement*.

Sample:

- Refer to the Thames Valley explanation of their assessment results on page 14 of this handbook.
- Insert relevant data from questionnaires.
- Draw attention to any correlations between the questionnaire data and the assessment results. See page 44 of the *1998–1999 Provincial Report on Achievement* for an example.

Part 3: School's Response to Results

- Recognize successes in results and link them to previous and ongoing actions.
- Identify specific weaknesses as well as ongoing and emerging issues.
- Pinpoint areas for further analysis.
- Comment on changes in results from the previous year and over time—focus on long-term trends rather than year-to-year fluctuations.
- Relate results to short-, medium- and long-term goals identified in previous action plans and point to new directions that will be addressed in upcoming school action plan.

Sample:

The staff is examining the work of students who achieved at Level 2 to determine where their work approaches the provincial standard and where specific interventions are required. The percentages of students performing at Level 3 and above in writing (33%) and mathematics (47%) are not meeting our expectations; finding possible reasons and solutions will require further analysis and discussion. Of interest is the significantly better performance of girls over boys in all areas over the past three years.

The school staff will meet to discuss these results and their implications for programs and instruction at ABC School. The plans will be discussed and approved by the school council. An action plan for improvement, to be developed by mid-March 2000, will contain specific measures to be implemented during the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 school years, with a review of the progress of the action plan in both June 2000 and June 2001.

Parents and guardians are encouraged to meet with their child's classroom teacher to discuss this report and its implications for classroom teaching. Any parent who wishes to take part in developing the school's action plan is welcome to do so. Please contact the principal's office for further details.

Principal's Signature: _____ Date: _____, 2000

Step 5: Review and Update the School Action Plan for Improvement

Objective: Revise the action plan so that it reflects the most up-to-date information about achievement by students in the school

- The purposes of a school action plan are to:
 - > increase the number of students achieving at higher levels;
 - > improve the school's programs, instruction and support services;
 - > help the school ensure an optimal allocation of resources; and
 - > meet local community accountability needs.
- In developing action plans, schools draw on good assessment data to provide teachers with the direction, information and support they need to improve instruction and assessment and to respond more effectively to students' learning needs. By outlining the school's goals and directions, action plans also invite parents and the community to participate in the process of school improvement.
- The process of developing a school action plan involves:
 - > evaluating all aspects of the school's learning environment;
 - > developing a plan to meet the school's needs;
 - > generating strategies to implement the plan;
 - > evaluating and reporting on the outcomes of the school plan; and
 - > ensuring renewal of the plan over subsequent years.
- On an ongoing basis, the action plan should be revised and updated so that it provides the most comprehensive, up-to-date and coherent improvement framework for teachers, students, parents and community members.
- Many schools have highly developed school plans in place. Other schools are in the early stages of developing and implementing their plans. Several boards have supported schools in this work by offering in-service in the following areas:
 - > managing change;
 - > school culture;
 - > vision, mission, values;
 - > characteristics of effective schools;
 - > gathering and interpreting data;
 - > modifying instructional programs using assessment data;
 - > building a school profile;
 - > developing and implementing a school action plan; and
 - > evaluating the effectiveness of the action plan.

Action Plan Criteria

- The purpose of the following criteria is to illustrate the full range of factors that an action plan must address. The criteria have ongoing relevance. As each school obtains new information about student achievement, it can continue to use the criteria to reassess its decisions and priorities, to review the initiatives and strategies outlined in its action plan and to modify the plan to address ongoing and emerging issues. An effective school action plan:
 - > Reflects the input of parents, the school council and the community;
 - > Articulates the school's vision and priorities, taking into account the vision and priorities articulated in the board action plan;
 - > Details initiatives taken by the school to improve student achievement;
 - > Recognizes procedures and strategies that are currently working well;
 - > Provides a mechanism for teachers and parents to share successful practices within the school community;
 - > Builds on school, board and provincial assessment results;
 - > Reviews the subject-specific and general recommendations contained in EQAO's most recent *Provincial Report on Achievement*;
 - > Incorporates recommendations and strategies outlined in the board action plan;
 - > Identifies areas that require improvement and explains how they will be addressed through the school's short-, medium- and long-term priorities;
 - > Describes the initiatives and strategies that will be used to achieve desired improvements;
 - > Sets realistic short-, medium- and long-term improvement targets;
 - > Outlines indicators, or measures of success, that the school will use to gauge its progress towards these targets;
 - > Describes processes for monitoring progress and for making ongoing adjustments to strategies and initiatives;
 - > Identifies the resources and in-service required and assigns responsibilities;
 - > Provides overall direction and support for teachers to develop and implement their individual classroom improvement plans; and
 - > Includes a mechanism for sharing the contents of the plan and updates on its impact with parents, the school council and the community.

Questions to Address in Developing the School Action Plan

Where are we going?

- learning objectives, outcome statements, goals, targets
- suggested indicators or measures of success

What programs or strategies will we use?

- interventions, expanded opportunities, teaching/learning strategies, innovative approaches, processes or procedures

What help do we need to get us there?

- supporting activities which are necessary to operationalize the plan
- resources (i.e., lists of school-based and/or external resource requirements; plans for the acquisition, allocation, sharing and utilization of these resources)
- new knowledge and/or skills through professional development (recommendations for professional development should include rationale, proposed content, participants and outcomes, budget)

Who are the people who will help get us there?

- an indication of the specific people (i.e., teachers, administrators, support staff, central board staff) who are responsible for carrying out each of the tasks laid out in the plan
- involvement of parents, the school council and community members at each stage of the improvement process

When will we get there?

- a fixed time line that schedules and sequences all the tasks and activities covered in the plan
- expectations for short- and long-term goals

How will we know that we are there?

- monitoring procedures for data collection at specified intervals

Michael Kozlow. "Using Data for School Improvement: A System-Wide Approach." *Orbit*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (1997)

Step 6: Monitor the Implementation of the Action Plan

Objective: To update the action plan throughout the year on the basis of quantitative and qualitative evidence gathered about the effect it is having on student achievement

"Modern schools have to become 'intelligent' in order to manage themselves. This intelligence includes learning how to use school data to set targets, monitor and evaluate progress."¹⁰ It is important for schools to track their progress in implementing the strategies and initiatives in the action plan. Monitoring provides critical feedback to teachers, students and parents. Done well, the monitoring process reinforces the confidence of parents and community members in the capacity of the school to evaluate its performance against the goals articulated in its action plan. Schools need to ensure that, in addition to identifying gaps, the monitoring process recognizes what is working well and motivates continued commitment.

Key Questions:

- What qualitative and quantitative data can we collect to gauge the effectiveness of the strategies and initiatives in the action plan?
- What methods should we use to collect the data?
- Who needs to be involved in this data-gathering process, and when and how often should it be done?
- Who should be involved in analyzing the data? Is there a need for additional support from board resource personnel or external experts?
- What process should be used to identify strengths and weaknesses in the strategies and initiatives outlined in the action plan? Who should be involved?
- How can we maintain interest and support throughout the monitoring process?
- How can we ensure the monitoring process is constructive at every stage?

¹⁰ Sammons, Thomas and Mortimer (1997).

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Individual Student and Classroom Program Improvement Planning

Classroom teachers are in the best position to influence and improve student learning. Teachers are responsible for working with individual children and for planning programs for the entire class. As *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8* states,

Teachers are responsible for developing a range of instructional strategies based on sound learning theory. They need to address different student needs and bring enthusiasm and a variety of teaching approaches to the classroom. Good teachers know that they must persevere and make every reasonable attempt to ensure sound learning for every student. (p. 4)

EQAO generates an *Individual Student Report (ISR)* for every student who participates in its elementary assessments. The *ISR* provides students, parents and teachers with detailed information about each student's performance on the assessments in three subject areas across a number of categories and mathematics strands.

The *ISR* is an important source of information about a student's achievement and progress:

- It provides information on a student's achievement in reading, writing and mathematics, measured against the expectations in *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8*.
- It gives background information on whether the student was enrolled in a special program or receiving special education support.
- It indicates whether the student was exempted from any portion of the assessment.
- It provides information on what (if any) accommodations the student received.

Since the *ISR* is distributed in the fall of the next year, it is the current teacher who is responsible for conducting follow-up with the student and his/her parents and for consulting with the teacher(s) who worked with the student during the previous year. In most cases, it will be up to the Grade 4 and Grade 7 teachers to make sure that they have appropriate background information on each child who participated in the assessment.

Reporting Schedule

September	<i>Individual Student Reports (ISRs)</i> returned to schools for distribution to parents and classroom teachers
October	EQAO releases the <i>Provincial Report on Achievement</i>
December	School boards and schools publish their preliminary reports on student achievement results
March	School boards and schools release their action plans for improvement

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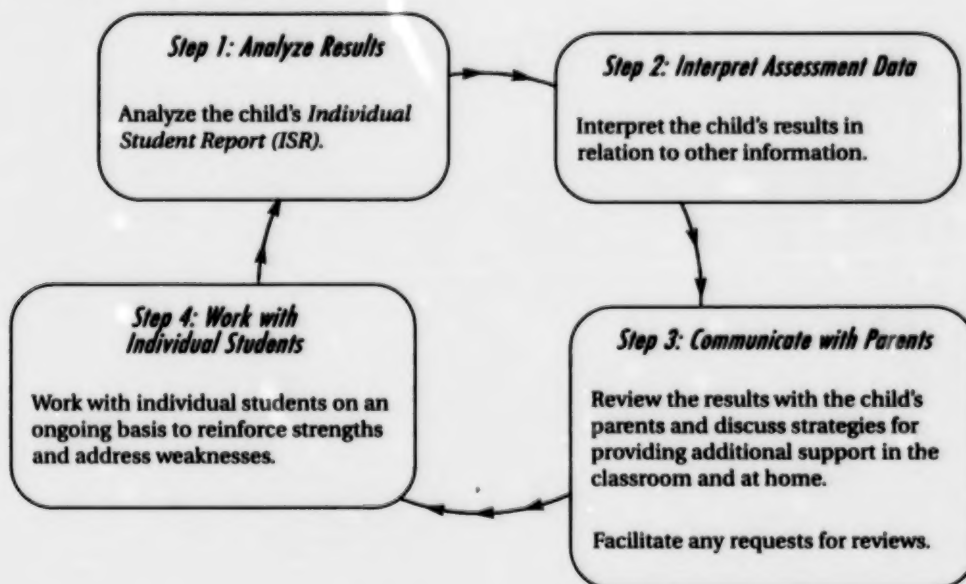
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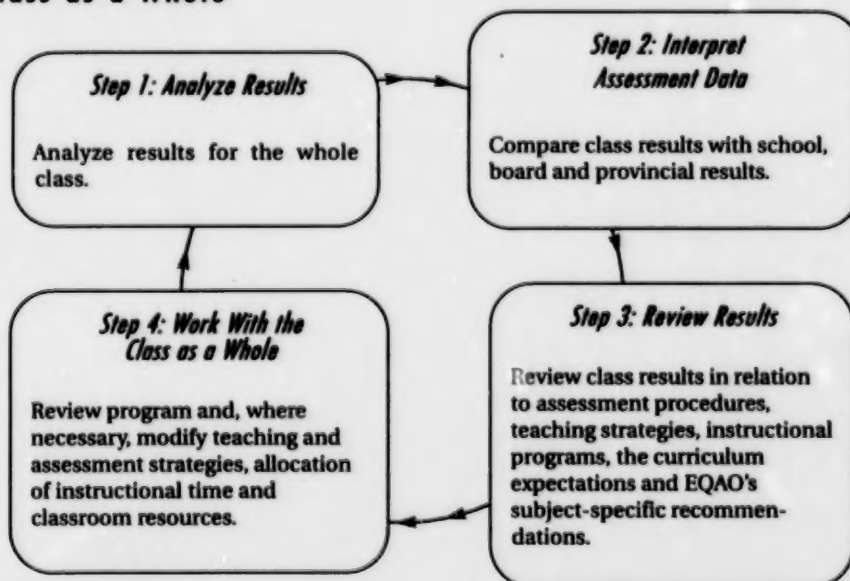
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The Individual Student and Classroom Program Improvement Planning Cycle

Part A: Individual Students



Part B: Class as a Whole



The current classroom teacher must examine each child's *ISR*, discuss the information in the *ISR* with the child's parents and use it to review and modify the child's individual program. At the same time, the *ISR* data are also useful to teachers in identifying strengths and weaknesses shared by students in the class. When reviewed together with the school data, these classroom data provide a solid basis for teachers to review and modify their programs.

There is clearly overlap between the process of examining individual student data and the process of examining class data. These two processes have been separated in the steps outlined in the following to emphasize the particular characteristics of each.

Part A: Individual Students

Step 1: Analyze Results

Objective: To gain a general understanding of the assessment and a picture of each child's achievement

The teacher will want to refer to the following materials:

- *Individual Student Report (ISR)*
- *Test Booklets*
- *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8*
- *Administration Guide*
- *Teacher's Daily Plans*
- *Assessment Scales*
- *Parent Handbook*

Questions:

- **General Framework of the Assessment:**
 - > What kinds of questions and activities did it contain?
 - > What are the components of the assessment scales (i.e., rubric)?
 - > Under what conditions (e.g., time constraints) was the assessment administered?
- **The Student's Results:**
 - > How did the student perform overall in each subject area?
 - > What strengths and weaknesses did the student demonstrate in the categories and mathematics strands?
 - > How do these strengths and weaknesses compare to those identified at the school, board and provincial levels?
 - > Is it possible to identify any patterns in the student's work? What

do these patterns mean? For example, if the student's achievement was weak in the category of Application of Language Conventions, the teacher would then want to look at possible causes through an examination of the student's test booklets.

- Are the results consistent with the student's current achievement? Do the student's booklets shed light on what may have caused any discrepancies?

Step 2: Interpret Assessment Data

Objective: To factor contextual information into the analysis of the student's assessment results

Resources:

- Personal information on the *ISR*
- Input from the child's parents and previous teachers/principal
- Information from the child
- Information about the child's achievement from classroom assessments, report cards and other sources
- Samples of student work provided by EQAO

Key Questions:

- What may have contributed to the strengths and weaknesses the student demonstrated on the assessment (e.g., use of a particular textbook or other resources, attendance)?
- Is the achievement reasonable in light of the student's program?
- What factors might account for any unexpected or inconsistent results (e.g., testing

conditions, lack of familiarity with the assessment format, limits on teacher assistance, anxiety, maturity)?

- Is it possible to identify any attitudinal factors that may be relevant?
- What changes should be made to the student's individual program to help him/her learn better?
- What measures could be adopted at school and at home to improve the student's achievement (e.g., reading at home, use of real-world mathematics activities)?

Step 3: Communicate With Parents

Objective: To inform the student's parents about the results and explore avenues for further home-school collaboration

Resources:

- *ISR*
- Test Booklets
- Assessment materials
- Assessment scales
- Samples of student work provided by EQAO
- Information about classroom program

Suggestions:

- Arrange parent-teacher conferences
- Prepare a summary of findings
- Discuss modifications to the student's individual program
- Review classroom improvement strategies
- Review strategies for supporting learning at home (see examples of strategies that parents can use at home provided on page 38)
- Use the samples of student work in discussions with students and parents

Strategies That Parents Can Use at Home

Grade 3: Reading Activity

Short & Sweet

Summarizing a story



Materials...

a book for reading, pencil,
paper for recording

Activities...

- Read the story together.
- Retell the story in your own words.
- Use the paper to record a short summary of the story.

Ideas to talk about...

- What is the most important event in the story?
- Which events are not important to the action of the story?
- Which ideas should you include in a summary of the story?
- What would happen if an important idea were left out?

Grade 3: Writing Activity

It's In the News

Objective reporting



Materials...

paper, pencils

Activities...

- Collect information from family members about what they have done in the last few days.
- Organize the information according to the day each event happened.
- Practise reading your report. Present it to your family as a newscast.

Ideas to talk about...

- How is your newscast the same as those on television? How is it different?

Grade 6: Reading Activity

It's all in the Title

Predicting events



Materials...

a book for reading, pencil,
paper for recording

Activities...

- Fold your paper in half.
- Look at the title of the book.
- Decide what you think the story will be about.
- Record three predictions on one half of the paper.
- Read the story together.
- Were your predictions accurate?
- Try to think up at least three new titles for the story.
- Record your new titles on the other half of the paper.

Ideas to talk about...

- What can you guess from the title?
- Which are the most important words in the title?
- Does a story need a title? Why?

Grade 6: Writing Activity

W5

Writing an objective newspaper report



Materials...

paper, pencil

Activities...

- Think of a place you have visited recently.
- Write a newspaper report about your visit.
- Use the W5 method of answering questions
 - Who?
 - What?
 - Why?
 - When?
 - Where?

Ideas to talk about...

- Is there a suitable headline for your report?

**Grade 3: Mathematics
Activity**

Follow the Litre

*Developing an understanding
of one litre*



Materials...

a one-litre container, containers
of other sizes, water

Activities...

- Choose a container that holds one litre.
- Find some containers of other sizes.
- Estimate which containers hold more than one litre, about one litre, and less than one litre.
- Fill your one-litre container with water.
- Pour water into each of your containers, starting with the largest.
- Make a chart to show what you find.

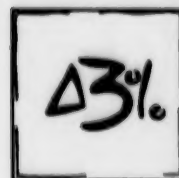
Ideas to talk about...

- How close were your estimates?

**Grade 6: Mathematics
Activity**

How Many?

*Estimating and
comparing quantity*



Materials...

a few jars with different shapes, one material
such as large pasta or beans

Activities...

- Set out several jars.
 - Fill each jar.
 - Estimate:
 - How many in each jar?
 - Which jar holds more?
 - Which holds fewer?
 - Count to check.
- Ideas to talk about...*
- Were your estimates close?
 - Why does one jar hold more than another?

Step 4: Work with Individual Students

Objective: To work with individual students to set and achieve short-, medium- and long-term learning goals

With support from their teachers and parents, students need to:

- examine the quality of their work in relation to the provincial expectations;
- become more familiar with the curriculum expectations and the assessment scales;
- review samples of student work and compare them with their own work;
- identify and prioritize personal learning goals;
- create a new plan or update an existing plan for achieving these goals; and
- monitor their progress over time through self-assessment, peer assessment and participation in classroom assessments.

Part B: Class

Step 1: Analyze Results

Objective: To gain an overall understanding of the class's achievement

Questions:

- How did the class perform overall in each subject area?
- What strengths and weaknesses did students generally demonstrate in the categories and mathematics strands?
- How do these strengths and weaknesses compare to those identified at the school, board and provincial levels?
- What patterns are evident in the class's achievement across the three subject areas? What do these patterns mean?

Step 2: Interpret Assessment Data

Objective: To factor contextual information into the analysis of the class's assessment results

Key Questions:

- What may have contributed to the strengths and weaknesses students demonstrated on the assessment (e.g., use of a particular textbook or other resources, class groupings, allocation of instructional time, homework)?
- What factors might account for any unexpected or inconsistent results (e.g., testing conditions, lack of familiarity with the assessment format, limits on teacher assistance, anxiety, maturity)?
- Is it possible to identify any attitudinal factors that may be relevant?

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- What changes should be made to the classroom program to reinforce strengths and address gaps in students' learning (e.g., reprioritizing expectations, reallocating class time for various subjects, modifying teaching and assessment strategies)?
- What measures could be adopted at school and at home to improve the students' achievement (e.g., reading at home, activities that increase students' enjoyment of mathematics)?

Step 3: Review instructional programs, the curriculum expectations and EQAO's subject-specific recommendations in light of the results

Objective: To determine where modifications may be required in programs, instructional and assessment strategies, resources and the allocation of class time

Key Questions for the Classroom Teacher:

- What aspects need to be given priority?
- What needs to happen for this reprioritization to occur?
- What actions do I need to take to implement these changes?
- What expertise and support are available in the school or elsewhere in the board?
- What professional development do I need?

Good assessment practice must be an integral part of teachers' ongoing work with students. In reviewing their classroom assessment practices, teachers may find the following checklist¹¹ useful:

Good assessment practice:

- is based on clear curriculum intentions;
- plays an integral part in classroom activities;
- is appropriate to the task;
- focusses on learning processes as well as learning outcomes;
- allows for unexpected as well as intended outcomes;
- draws upon a wide range of evidence;
- places achievement in context;
- indicates strengths and identifies weaknesses;
- involves pupils in reflection and review; and
- informs about individual progress.

¹¹ Association of Assessment Inspectors and Advisers – Members' Handbook, 1996-97, in Mary James, *Using Assessment for School Improvement*. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers. 1998.

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With support from their teachers and parents, students need to:

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- become more familiar with the curriculum expectations and the assessment scales;
- review samples of student work and compare them with their own work;
- identify and prioritize personal learning goals;
- create a new plan or update an existing plan for achieving these goals; and
- monitor their progress over time through self-assessment, peer assessment and participation in classroom assessments.

Working With Students in the Classroom

- Discuss the characteristics of the various levels and compare the levels to the ones used in classroom assessments and evaluations of the student work.
- Review the levels above the ones assigned together with students' assessment booklets in order to identify teaching strategies that will help the students reach the next levels.
- After reviewing assessment scales, the *Individual Student Reports* and the samples of student work provided by EQAO, ask the students to interpret the scales in their own words and to reread and assess other work they have done.
- Use the assessment scales and anchor booklets as a guide or model for subsequent student work.
- Copy and use the student anchor booklets and rationales as examples for students.
- Provide opportunities for students to work independently as well as collaboratively.
- Use the assessment scales as a guide for marking future assignments.
- Develop individual student profiles outlining strengths and weaknesses.
- If possible, work with teachers who helped to mark the assessments.

For Reading

- Ensure students pay attention to the various features of a text, e.g., organization of ideas, use of tables of contents.
- Use forms and features of writing to improve the students' understanding of what they read.
- Use questions and activities from the assessment as a guide for classroom assessment activities.

For Writing

- Use reading activities to show students how writers organize and develop their ideas and how they employ different kinds of organization and points of view to convey information or express opinions.
- Give the students opportunities to work both individually and collaboratively at all stages of the writing process.
- Provide opportunities for students to work to integrate and consolidate the writing skills outlined in the provincial curriculum.
- Give students opportunities to become familiar with and practise the revision and editing stages.
- Have the students discuss their own writing and other students' writing using the assessment scales.

For Mathematics

- Provide opportunities for students to build proficiency in applying mathematical procedures.
- Emphasize the problem-solving process. Provide opportunities for students to develop their skills in choosing strategies for solving problems, drawing conclusions and making inferences.
- Help students learn the language of mathematics, and have them explain all aspects of a problem or solution.
- Provide time and opportunities for students to express their mathematical knowledge in words, pictures and charts and in discussions.
- Use the sample assessment unit as a model for problem-solving tasks.

Acknowledgements

EQAO would like to acknowledge the school boards, school principals, teachers, school councils and parents who contributed information to this handbook.

School Boards

EQAO drew on all of the action plans that school boards submitted in February 1999. This handbook features many examples from the action plans that are currently posted on EQAO's web site. Several school boards also provided background material on their system improvement planning processes:

- Durham District School Board
- Peel District School Board
- Thames Valley District School Board
- York Region District School Board Schools

Schools

The following schools provided detailed information about their improvement planning processes, strategies and initiatives:

- Beverley Acres School, Richmond Hill
- Broadway Public School, Woodstock
- Byron Somerset School, London
- C. C. Carrothers School, London
- Glengrove School, Pickering
- Glen Street School, Oshawa
- Maple Lane School, Tillsonburg
- Nobleton Public School, Nobleton
- Highbush School, Pickering
- Parkview School, Komoka
- Sir John A. MacDonald School, Pickering
- Stoneybrook Public School
- Woodland Heights Public School, London

School Councils

The following school councils completed a detailed questionnaire and provided information on parent and school council participation in school improvement planning efforts.

- Beverley Acres School Council, Richmond Hill
- Broadway Public School, Woodstock
- C. C. Carrothers School, London
- Glengrove School, Pickering
- Glen Street School, Oshawa
- Greenbrier School, Brampton
- Maple Lane School Council, Tillsonburg